

The Christ Is Acted On The Stage By Franklin Fyles

(Special Correspondence.)

New York, Dec. 13.—Maurice Maeterlinck imagines that Mary of Magdala was a courtesan of high degree, the most beautiful woman in Judea, and so affluent in her infamy that she lolls in lazy luxury at a beautiful villa in Bethany, a little way out of Jerusalem. To make a play like that which is now at the New Theatre from the short Biblical accounts of Mary's redemption by Christ, necessitates a digression into sensuality. The story of divine love and compassion must be merged into one of human lust. Also, the woman's moral degradation needs to be shown for the sake of contrast with her religious exaltation.

Maeterlinck assigns the women in her sin to a Roman general, Lucius Verus, who derides the Nazarene as a faker, accuses him of enticing her away carnally and offers to save him from the cross if she will recant her faith and go back to concubinage. Simon, the healed leper, and Lazarus, the once dead, are her neighbors. A multitude of stricken follow him in his visit to these human proofs of his divinity, and clamor for miraculous cures. The play begins with that. Mary and her Roman friends look upon the noisy rabble beyond the garden wall and describe Christ. Soon his voice is heard in melodiously sonorous utterances of language recorded of him in Scripture. Mary is spell-bound while her companion derides. Against his protest, for they surmise that the mob may abuse her, she goes to the Nazarene. The din of an attack upon her silences His voice until He raises it again to say: "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Thus He has rescued her from violence, possibly death, quite like an ordinary stage hero; but after a moment it is a Redeemer who says: "Go and sin no more." She comes back a Christian.

Olga Nethersole, actress of many scarlet transgressor, and notably of Sapho, so boldly that the police stopped her—until the play was advertised valuably, when it went on—embodies this Magdalene. She is a friend and guest of the Maeterlincks. She was with them in France when this play was completed. That is why she can place herself in the original mounting of it at the New Theatre before it has been acted in Europe. She is

more graphic in lust with the Roman general than in the spiritual uplift of the Nazarene's mercy. She makes herself look like another Cleopatra at first and less like a Christian saint at the last.

Olga is an artist, though, and she gives a vital, vibrant, soul-and-body delineation. She is tensest when, Jesus having been sentenced to death; she is frantic with the desire to save Him. She has no knowledge of the Christian scheme of salvation through God's sacrifice of his son. She has no thought that the Savior is divine. So she undertakes unwittingly, by a rescue of him on his way to Calvary, to frustrate his design of universal redemption.

That is in the final third of the drama. One disciple has betrayed Jesus and all have abandoned Him. The room is the one in which they have partaken of His last supper. Now it is thronged by those whom He has healed, and who are grateful, but not bravely loyal. Mary begs them to turn the apartment into an ambush from which to rush out when Christ is brought along and carry him away to a hiding place. But they are cowardly. They tremble at the sight of a soldier in the street outside and slink below the row of windows that might expose them.

All the men and women mentioned specifically by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as miraculously healed makes a nondescript assemblage. Mary implores them to strike for the life of one who has saved theirs. Even Lazarus, a tall, gaunt man as livid with fear as he was with death, when, obedient to the Nazarene's command, he came forth from his tomb, would not risk his renewed life for his benefactor's.

Enter now Mary's still importunate lover, Lucius Verus. He is a soldier and not a coward. And in his official position he can rescue Christ if he will. Mary beseeches him to do it. He says it would expose him to Caesar's destructive wrath. Then, too, he holds obdurately to his jealous belief that the Savior is his rival in her carnal love. So why save Him from the cross? Unless she will renounce her faith and fall back into harlotry. She won't do that. Verus strides out to

vengefully supervise the crucifixion. He is acted well by Edward Mackay. Charles B. Hanford and Arthur Forrest, Shakespearians from away back, are others who dignify the play.

But the actor who has made Jesus audible is not named in the program. Will he become visible when he passes outside the windows on his way to Calvary? The audience waits in almost palpable anxiety. It is the kind of assemblage that New York provides for great operatic occasions, but hardly ever for a drama. The New Theatre is a modish institution and nothing yet done in it has aroused more interest. It is a musical event, also, for the Russian Symphonic Orchestra of sixty is playing the music made for the play from old Hebraic and oriental melodies.

Something of awe has been created. There has been no applause—not even at the entrance of the star actress, and Miss Nethersole was visible rebuffed by the silence. Surely fashion is in a reverential mood. But does it hope—or dread—that they will see an imitation of Christ? That is hard to say. The secret had been guarded. A few who had read the manuscript knew that Maeterlinck gave no directions for such an exhibit. It had been said that he disapproved it. Personations of the Savoir are not unusual in Catholic communities and parishes, from Oberammergau to the East Side of New York. When the old monkish morality play of "Everyman" was revived in London, God sat enthroned on the stage, but during the ensuing tour of the United States a hidden actor spoke for the Creator.

Evidently Miss Nethersole has been authorized by Maeterlinck to do as she pleases. The theatre is hushed when the persons in the scene, peering but timidly through the wide windows at the back, say that Jesus is toiling up the hill, jeered, taunted, maltreated. Now or not at all he will appear.

"He turns his face this way," says one; "he knows we are here."

Then a semblance of that Jesus of Nazareth to whom all Christendom is about to render its annual special homage walks slowly past the windows.

Odd Items of Interest

The average amount of illness in a human life is nine days a year.

A cork 200 feet below the surface of the water will not rise owing to the pressure.

A shoal of herring is sometimes five or six miles in length, and two or three in breadth.

Every workman in Japan wears on his cap and on his back an inscription giving his business and his employer's name.

At the present time a perfect ruby of five carats will average at least five times the value of a diamond of the same size and quality.

A Swiss scientist has been testing the presence of bacteria in the mountain air, and finds that not a single microbe exists above an altitude of 2,000 feet.

Deer owe more to their noses than to their eyes or ears for preservation from danger. Sportsmen may and do deceive the last two organs, but the sense of smell cannot be cheated.

The average depth of the sea in yards is as

follows: Pacific, 4,252; Atlantic, 4,026; Indian, 3,658; Antarctic, 3,000; Arctic, 1,690; Mediterranean, 1,476; Irish, 240; English channel, 110; Adriatic, 45; Baltic, 43.

In this country alone there are said to be from 3,000 to 4,000 kinds of flies, while throughout the world there are 40,000 kinds.

The ragpickers of Paris, in most instances, inherit their occupation, and it is passed from father to son for generations. Each ragpicker has its own district, which is inherited by the children and grandchildren.

During the year 1909 as many as 497 rocks and shoals dangerous to navigators were reported. Of these 14 were discovered by vessels striking on them, 107 were reported by surveying ships, 12 by other of his majesty's ships, 19 by various British and foreign authorities, and 345 by colonial and foreign governments, while in the same period 32 previously reported were expunged from the charts.

Alkarazza is the name given in South America to vessels of very porous earthenware which when filled with water are always moist outside, and

owing to the evaporation of the water on their surface always keep their contents cool. Alkarazza can be made from any good potter's clay by mixing with it 10 per cent of its weight, dry, of very fine sawdust and then working it. On burning the sawdust the clay is thereby left porous.

The amount of earth brought to the surface of poor pasture land by worms has been calculated at as much as 18 tons an acre a year. Calculating 26,886 worms to exist in an acre, to obtain 15 tons to the acre would be work at 20 ounces for every worm.

Japanese horses wear shoes of rice straw. The Iceland peasant shoes his horse with sheep's horn. In Asia, in the upper Oxus valley, horse-shoes made of the antlers of the mountain deer, fastened with horn pins, are employed. Horses in the Soudan wear socks of camel's skin.

The total area of the British empire is nearly 11,400,000 square miles, with a total population of about 410,000,000. The known surface of the globe is estimated at 55,000,000 square miles, and its total population is believed to be about 1,800,000,000, so that the British empire has control over more than one-fifth of the world's population.